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ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNTIED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa

Note by the Secretary-General

The eighth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, was held at Geneva, from 5 to 15 February 1996. The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly, annexed to the present note, the report on that session.

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ANNEX

Report of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, on its eighth session

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I. INTRODUCTION

Opening and duration of the session

1. The eighth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, was held at Geneva from 5 to 15 February 1996. The session was convened in accordance with paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 50/112 of 20 December 1995, entitled "Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa". At its eighth session, the Committee held eight meetings (1st to 8th).

II. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

A. Officers of the Committee

2. At its sixth session, the Committee, in accordance with paragraph 3 (a) of its resolution 6/1, decided that Working Group I would have an additional Vice-Chairman. Accordingly, at the 5th meeting, on 7 February 1996, the Committee elected Mr. Franklin C. Moore (United States of America) as Vice-Chairman of Working Group I by acclamation.

3. At the 7th meeting, on 13 February, the Committee elected Mr. Mohamed Mahmoud Ould El Ghaouth (Mauritania) as Chairman of Working Group I to replace Mr. Mourad Ahmia (Algeria), who was unable to continue his functions in that post.

4. At the 8th meeting, on 15 February, the Committee elected Ms. A. K. Ahuja (India) as its Vice-Chairman to replace Mr. T. P. Sreenivasan (India), who was also unable to continue his functions in that post.

5. The Bureau of the Committee, as elected at its sixth and eighth sessions, is as follows:

Chairman: Mr. Bo Kjellén (Sweden)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. René Valéry Mongbe (Benin)
Ms. A. K. Ahuja (India)
Mr. José Urrutia (Peru)

Rapporteur: Mr. Nikita F. Glazovsky (Russian Federation)

Working Group I

Chairman: Mr. Mohamed Mahmoud Ould El Ghaouth (Mauritania)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. Mohammad Reza H. K. Jabbary (Islamic Republic of Iran)
Mr. Erwin Ortíz-Gandarillas (Bolivia)
Mr. Franklin C. Moore (United States of America)

Working Group II

Chairman: Mr. Takao Shibata (Japan)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. David Etuket (Uganda)
Mr. Anatoli M. Ovchinnikov (Uzbekistan)

B. Adoption of the agenda

6. At its 1st meeting, on 5 February, the Committee adopted the following agenda:

1. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.

2. Preparation for the Conference of the Parties.

3. Special action:

   (a) Urgent action for Africa;

   (b) Action taken in other regions.

4. Status of signature and ratification of the Convention.

5. Review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds.

6. Adoption of the provisional agenda for the ninth session.

7. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its eighth session.

C. Attendance

7. Representatives of the following States attended the session: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Holy See, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakstan, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia,

Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principle, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

8. Palestine was also represented.

9. The following United Nations offices and organs were represented: United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Institute for Training and Research and United Nations Volunteers.

10. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific was represented.

11. The following specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system were represented: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Bank, International Telecommunication Union, World Meteorological Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Industrial Development Organization and Global Environment Facility.

12. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation, Arab Maghreb Union, Commission of the European Communities, Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), League of Arab States, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Organization of African Unity, Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), Sahara and Sahel Observatory and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

13. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: Actions pour le développement rural intégré, Association des volontaires pour le développement, Association pour la protection de la nature, Australia Wilderness Society, Comité de coordination des actions des organisations non-gouvernementales au Mali, Comité Nacional Pro Defensa de la Fauna y Flora, Conféderation des organisations non-gouvernementales d'environnement et de développement de l'Afrique centrale, Coopérative d'agriculture et d'élevage de reboisement de Bareina, Development Group, Environment Liaison Centre International, Environmental Monitoring Group South Africa, Environmentalist Society, Sudan, Environnement et développement du tiers-monde, European Environmental Bureau, Friends of the Earth, Friends World Committee for Consultation, Fundacíon del Sur, GECOU Research Group, German Forum, Guamina, Guinée-Ecologie, Institut de recherche sur l'environnement, International Academy of the Environment, International Council of Women, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Namibia Development Trust, Natural Heritage Institute, Proterra, Sahel Défis: Développement Environnement Formation Insertion Social, Service Extension and Action Research for Communities in the

Hills (SEARCH)-Nepal, Society for Conservation and Protection of the Environment, Solidarité Canada Sahel, Stockholm Environment Institute, Thusano Lefatsheng, Uganda Women Tree Planting Movement, World Learning USA, World Young Women's Christian Association, Youth for Action and Zero-Zimbabwe.

D. Documentation

14. The documents before the Committee at its eighth session are listed in appendix I to the present report.

E. Accreditation of non-governmental organizations

15. At its 1st meeting, on 5 February, the Committee, bearing in mind paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 47/188 of 22 December 1992 and rule 49 of the rules of procedure of the Committee (A/AC.241/3), decided to approve the accreditation of the non-governmental organizations listed in document A/AC.241/9/Add.11 (see appendix II, decision 8/1).

III. PREPARATION FOR THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

16. The question of preparation of the Conference of the Parties (agenda item 2) was considered by Working Groups I and II.

A. Recommendations of Working Group I

17. At the 8th meeting, on 15 February, the Vice-Chairman of Working Group I, Mr. Erwin Ortíz-Gandarillas (Bolivia), reported on the outcome of the deliberations in that Working Group and introduced four draft decisions recommended by the Working Group for adoption by the Committee.

Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning

18. The Committee adopted a draft decision (A/AC.241/WG.I(8)/L.1) entitled "Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning", as orally revised by the Vice-Chairman of the Working Group (see appendix II, decision 8/2).

Programme and budget

19. The Committee adopted a draft decision (A/AC.241/WG.I(8)/L.2) entitled "Programme and budget" (see appendix II, decision 8/3).

Draft financial rules of the Conference of the Parties, its subsidiary bodies and the permanent secretariat

20. The Committee adopted a draft decision (A/AC.241/WG.I(8)/L.3) entitled "Draft financial rules of the Conference of the Parties, its subsidiary bodies and the permanent secretariat" (see appendix II, decision 8/4).

Identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism

21. The Committee adopted a draft decision (A/AC.241/WG.I(8)/L.4) entitled "Identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism", as orally revised by the Vice-Chairman of the Working Group (see appendix II, decision 8/5).

B. Recommendations of Working Group II

22. At the 8th meeting, on 15 February, the Chairman of Working Group II, Mr. Takao Shibata (Japan), reported on the outcome of the deliberations in that Working Group and introduced five draft decisions recommended by the Working Group for adoption by the Committee.

Organization of scientific and technological cooperation

23. The Committee adopted a draft decision (A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.1) entitled "Organization of scientific and technological cooperation" (see appendix II, decision 8/6).

Draft rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties

24. The Committee adopted a draft decision (A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.2) entitled "Draft rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties" (see appendix II, decision 8/7).

Procedures for communication of information and review of implementation

25. The Committee adopted a draft decision (A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.3) entitled "Procedures for communication of information and review of implementation" (see appendix II, decision 8/8).

Procedures for conciliation and arbitration

26. The Committee adopted a draft decision (A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.4) entitled "Procedures for conciliation and arbitration", as orally revised by the Chairman of the Working Group (see appendix II, decision 8/9).

Procedures to resolve questions on implementation

27. The Committee adopted a draft decision (A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.5) entitled "Procedures to resolve questions on implementation", as orally revised by the Chairman of the Working Group (see appendix II, decision 8/10).

C. Presentations on water and energy

28. At its 4th meeting, on 7 February, the Committee heard presentations on water and energy.

29. At its 8th meeting, on 15 February, the Committee had before it a conference room paper containing conclusions by the Chairman on these presentations (A/AC.241/CRP.17), which the Committee agreed to annex to the present report (see appendix III).

IV. SPECIAL ACTION

30. The Committee held a discussion on the questions of special action: urgent action for Africa (agenda item 3(a)) and action taken in other regions (agenda item 3(b)) at its 2nd to 6th meetings, on 8, 9 and 14 February 1996.

31. At its 8th meeting, on 15 February, the Committee had before it a conference room paper containing conclusions by the Chairman on the item (A/AC.241/CRP.16), which the Committee agreed to annex to the report (see appendix III).

V. STATUS OF SIGNATURE AND RATIFICATION OF THE CONVENTION

32. The Committee held a discussion on the question of the status of signature and ratification of the Convention (agenda item 4) at its 2nd and 6th meetings, on 6 and 12 February 1996.

33. The Executive Secretary of the interim secretariat informed the Committee that 25 countries had ratified the Convention.

34. A number of countries indicated that they had finalized or were in the process of ratifying the Convention.

35. The representative of the Russian Federation stated that his Government had decided not to sign the Convention. In taking the decision whether or not to accede to the Convention, the Russian Federation would first take into account whether the status of the Russian Federation as a country with an economy in transition would be considered.

36. The Chairman stated that the discussion held would indicate that the Convention was likely to enter into force this year and recalled that the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/112, had indicated that the Conference of the Parties would be held in the second and third weeks of August 1997. The Chairman added that it would be preferable to hold the Conference in the first two weeks of September 1997.

VI. REVIEW OF THE SITUATION AS REGARDS EXTRABUDGETARY FUNDS

37. The Committee held a discussion on the question of the review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds (agenda item 5) at its 5th and 6th meetings, on 7 and 13 February 1996.

38. At its 8th meeting, on 15 February, the Committee had before it a conference room paper containing conclusions by the Chairman on the item

(A/AC.241/CRP.18), which the Committee agreed to annex to the report (see appendix III).

VII. PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE NINTH SESSION

39. At its 8th meeting, on 15 February, the Committee approved a draft provisional agenda for its ninth session (see appendix IV).

VIII. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ITS EIGHTH SESSION

40. At its 8th meeting, on 15 February, the Committee adopted its draft report as contained in documents A/AC.241/L.29 and Add.1, and authorized the Acting Rapporteur, Mr. José Urrutia (Peru), Vice-Chairman of the Committee, to finalize it in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee.

APPENDIX I

List of documents before the Committee at its eighth session

Document symbol	Agenda item	Title or description
A/AC.241/9/Add.11	1	List of non-governmental organizations recommended for accreditation by the Committee
A/AC.241/42	1	Provisional agenda for the eighth session
A/AC.241/43	2	Note by the Secretariat on the identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism
A/AC.241/44	2	Note by the Secretariat on the designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning
A/AC.241/45	2	Note by the Secretariat on the draft financial rules of the Conference of the Parties, its subsidiary bodies and the permanent secretariat
A/AC.241/46	2	Note by the Secretariat on the programme and budget
A/AC.241/47	2	Note by the Secretariat on the organization of scientific and technological cooperation
A/AC.241/48	2	Note by the Secretariat on the draft rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties
A/AC.241/49	2	Note by the Secretariat on the procedures for communication of information and review of implementation
A/AC.241/50	2	Note by the Secretariat on procedures to resolve questions on implementation
A/AC.241/51 and Corr.1	2	Note by the Secretariat on procedures for conciliation and arbitration
A/AC.241/52 and Add.1	5	Note by the Secretariat on the review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds
A/AC.241/L.29 and Add.1	7	Draft report of the Committee on its eighth session
A/AC.241/CRP.16	3	Conference room paper containing conclusions by the Chairman on agenda item 3

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Document symbol	Agenda item	Title or description
A/AC.241/CRP.17	2	Conference room paper containing conclusions by the Chairman on presentations on water and energy
A/AC.241/CRP.18	5	Conference room paper containing conclusions by the Chairman on agenda item 5
A/AC.241/WG.I(8)/L.1	2	Draft decision submitted by the Vice-Chairman of Working Group I, Mr. Erwin Ortíz-Gandarillas (Bolivia), entitled "Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning"
A/AC.241/WG.I(8)/L.2	2	Draft decision submitted by the Vice-Chairman of Working Group I, Mr. Erwin Ortíz-Gandarillas (Bolivia), entitled "Programme and budget"
A/AC.241/WG.I(8)/L.3	2	Draft decision submitted by the Vice-Chairman of Working Group I, Mr. Erwin Ortíz-Gandarillas (Bolivia), entitled "Draft financial rules of the Conference of the Parties, its subsidiary bodies and the permanent secretariat"
A/AC.241/WG.I(8)/L.4	2	Draft decision submitted by the Vice-Chairman of Working Group I, Mr. Erwin Ortíz-Gandarillas (Bolivia), entitled "Identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism"
A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.1	2	Draft decision submitted by the Chairman of Working Group II, entitled "Organization of scientific and technological cooperation"
A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.2	2	Draft decision submitted by the Chairman of Working Group II, entitled "Draft rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties"
A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.3	2	Draft decision submitted by the Chairman of Working Group II, entitled "Procedures for communication of information and review of implementation"
A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.4	2	Draft decision submitted by the Chairman of Working Group II, entitled "Procedures for conciliation and arbitration"
A/AC.241/WG.II(8)/L.5	2	Draft decision submitted by the Chairman of Working Group II, entitled "Procedures to resolve questions on implementation"

APPENDIX II

Decisions adopted by the Committee at its eighth session

Decision 8/1

Accreditation of non-governmental organizations

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, bearing in mind paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 47/188 of 22 December 1992 and rule 49 of the rules of procedure of the Committee (A/AC.241/3), decided to approve the accreditation of the following non-governmental organizations:

ACTIONAID
Collectif d'actions pour le développement intégré dans les communautés (CADIC)
Coopérative d'agriculture et d'élevage de reboisement de Bareina
Green Cross International (GCI)
Youth for Action

Decision 8/2

Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, decides:

(a) To transmit to its next session the draft decision submitted by Uganda at the seventh session on behalf of States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77 and China (A/AC.241/WG.I(VII)/L.1);

(b) To invite members of the Committee to submit to the interim secretariat by 1 June 1996 written comments regarding the note by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the administrative arrangements for the permanent secretariat contained in document A/AC.241/44;

(c) To request relevant international organizations and departments and programmes of the United Nations, as well as agencies of the United Nations system, particularly those referred to in paragraph 8 of the note by the Secretary-General, to submit to the interim secretariat in writing by 1 June 1996: (i) expressions of interest in providing overall administrative support to the permanent secretariat; (ii) information to justify this interest and to describe the possible nature of such support on the basis of the criteria in annex I to document A/AC.241/34; and/or (iii) indications of which of these support services could also be provided as an adjunct to overall arrangements

between the Conference of the Parties and the United Nations of the type outlined in the note by the Secretary-General;

(d) To request Governments interested in hosting the permanent secretariat to submit the details of their offers, pursuant to its decision 7/5, prior to 1 June 1996;

(e) To request the interim secretariat to compile the materials referred to in paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) above, and to circulate the compilation as far in advance of the ninth session of the Committee as possible;

(f) To consider this question further at its ninth session on the basis of the compilation by the interim secretariat and documents A/AC.241/34, A/AC.241/44 and A/AC.241/WG.I(VII)/L.1.

Decision 8/3

Programme and budget

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, having considered the question of programme and budget at its eighth session, requests the interim secretariat to submit for consideration at the last session of the Committee prior to the first session of the Conference of the Parties a draft programme of work of the Conference of the Parties and the budget estimates of the Convention for the first financial period following the first session of the Conference of the Parties, using as a basis document A/AC.241/46 and taking into account the views on this question expressed by delegations at the eighth session of the Committee, as well as consideration by the Committee of financial rules and of the designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning.

Decision 8/4

Draft financial rules of the Conference of the Parties, its subsidiary bodies and the permanent secretariat

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, having considered, at its eighth session, the question of the financial rules discussed in document A/AC.241/45, invites the interim secretariat to submit a revised version of the financial rules to the Committee at its ninth session, taking into account views expressed by delegations at the eighth session.

Decision 8/5

Identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, having considered, at its eighth session, the note by the Secretariat on the identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism (A/AC.241/43):

(a) Invites members of the Committee, as well as regional and other interest groups, to submit to the interim secretariat by 1 May 1996 written comments on the functions of the Global Mechanism;

(b) Requests the interim secretariat to compile for consideration at the ninth session of the Committee the submissions referred to in paragraph (a), as well as comments on this question made by delegations and groups of delegations at the eighth session and any additional information received from relevant institutions;

(c) Also requests the interim secretariat to prepare for the ninth session a preliminary negotiating text on the functions of the Global Mechanism and the criteria for selection of an institution to house it, bearing in mind comments made by delegations and groups of delegations at the eighth session, and the compilation referred to in paragraph (b).

Decision 8/6

Organization of scientific and technological cooperation

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, noting the progress made in Working Group II on the organization of scientific and technological cooperation, requests the interim secretariat to prepare for the ninth session:

(a) A revised draft decision on the terms of reference of the Committee on Science and Technology reflecting the deliberations in Working Group II at the eighth session;

(b) Draft decisions on the roster of independent experts and on ad hoc panels based on comments and suggestions made at the eighth session and on any further views that might be communicated by its members to the interim secretariat, in writing, by 15 April 1996.

Decision 8/7

Draft rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, noting the progress in Working Group II on the draft rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties on the basis of document A/AC.241/48, requests the interim secretariat to prepare a revised text for the ninth session reflecting the deliberations in Working Group II during the eighth session.

Decision 8/8

Procedures for communication of information and review of implementation

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, noting the progress accomplished in Working Group II on the draft decision of the Conference of the Parties on communication of information and review of implementation contained in document A/AC.241/49, as well as the relationship that exists between this subject and the work being done in other forums with respect to the identification of benchmarks and indicators to measure progress in the implementation of the Convention, requests the interim secretariat to prepare, for the ninth session, a revised draft decision of the Conference of the Parties on this subject reflecting the deliberations in Working Group II at the eighth session, and to report on the work being done on benchmarks and indicators.

Decision 8/9

Procedures for conciliation and arbitration

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, having considered the question of the adoption of annexes on conciliation and arbitration on the basis of document A/AC.241/50, decides to postpone further consideration of this item to the first session of the Conference of the Parties, and invites members of the Committee to provide comments in writing to the interim secretariat.

Decision 8/10

Procedures to resolve questions on implementation

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, having considered the question of the procedures to resolve questions on implementation on the basis of document A/AC.241/51, decides to postpone further consideration of this item to the first session of the Conference of the Parties, and invites members of the Committee to provide comments in writing to the interim secretariat.

APPENDIX III

Conclusions by the Chairman

A. Water and energy

The need to take an integrated approach in combating desertification: the contributions of water management and alternative energy strategies

1. A central feature of the Convention is the need to see land management as part of a broader spectrum of sectoral policies, including water, energy, trade, population and various elements of socio-economic policy-making. This is also in line with the general approach promoted by Agenda 21.

2. It is highly desirable that the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, and later the Conference of the Parties, should try to strengthen this horizontal approach. At the eighth session, therefore, the Chairman invited Dr. Gunilla Björklund of the Stockholm Environment Institute, to present the ongoing work on a comprehensive water assessment, and Dr. Robert Hamwey of the International Academy of Environment to give a presentation of energy issues related to the drylands.

3. The Committee followed these presentations with keen interest. The presentations were circulated to the Committee during the session.

B. Special action

1. Urgent action for Africa

4. The discussion on urgent action for Africa was structured to concentrate first on southern Africa and then successively on East Africa and the Horn of Africa, North Africa, and West Africa. Subregional organizations made introductory statements, which were followed by national presentations and comments by the donor community. These statements reflected considerable activity in the various regions and indicated the seriousness with which all concerned parties approach the interim action for Africa and the preparations for the entry into force of the Convention. A great number of countries indicated that the processes of ratification of the Convention were well under way.

5. Regional differences were highlighted during the discussion. However, it was obvious that a number of general points were particularly relevant at this stage; they are outlined below.

Effectiveness of activities at the national level

6. Affected countries in Africa are putting in place the machinery to prepare national action programmes. Most have set up national coordinating bodies of government officials, although this has not necessarily translated into

Convention implementation receiving a high enough priority in national development programmes.

7. Affected countries have also begun to involve other interested parties at the national level, particularly non-governmental organizations. Some have also taken steps to involve local communities through devices such as district workshops. Much remains to be done, however, to strengthen the bottom-up approach by ensuring full participation of non-governmental organizations and local communities in all countries. The people in the villages have to see that the Convention can change their reality.

8. In one or two cases, countries have progressed to the stage of holding national forums involving the donor community. In general, however, efforts to involve donor countries and multilateral agencies fully in the design of action programmes have not yet borne fruit. Donor coordination activities, such as "chef de fil" arrangements, are in their infancy. The establishment of effective coordination mechanisms and a well-functioning partnership with the donor community under the Convention is a complex process. Field-level assistance organizations need more information about the role of the Convention in their programming.

9. With strong support from the interim secretariat, bilateral donors and United Nations agencies, national awareness seminars are widespread and are doing a good job of educating key national actors, in both the public and private sectors, about the significance of the Convention. Media coverage of these events has been good. We now need to see how to follow up with a continuing effort at public education. Results in some countries are promising in this respect.

10. More needs to be done to ensure the integration of national action programmes with other sustainable development programmes, such as the National Environmental Action Programmes (NEAPS) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) national conservation strategies. Action in a few countries illustrates what might be possible.

11. Bilateral and multilateral donor organizations described many significant initiatives to provide funding and technical assistance specifically for the urgent action in Africa. These need to be explained further so as to facilitate their utilization by affected countries and their subregional organizations.

12. Non-governmental organizations are doing a good job of networking and organizing themselves, through devices such as focal points, to support Convention implementation. They need continued support to enhance their local-level activities.

Effectiveness of activities at the subregional level

13. The process of preparing subregional action programmes is off to a good start. Initial meetings, with good participation from both Governments and non-governmental organizations, have already been held and elements of action programmes have been defined. In some cases, however, participation of the international community in these events could have been better.

14. Workshops to involve media have been a notable feature of subregional meetings. It would be interesting to see what results have flowed in terms of increased and higher quality media coverage of the Convention. In this context we have also heard encouraging examples of national action to mobilize media interest.

15. Some subregional organizations suggest the need for "enabling funds" to help them pursue action programme preparations.

Lessons for future implementation of the Convention

16. Coordination between affected countries and international partners is critical but difficult. We need to see more clearly how this should work.

17. More thought needs to be given to the difficult problem of ensuring that subregional activities reinforce local action.

18. Exchange of information and meetings among different subregions can have positive results.

19. Implementation of the Convention and food-security concerns should be tightly interrelated. A first step in this process would be integration of Convention concerns into the agenda of the World Food Summit.

20. More thought should be given to putting together the various elements of Convention implementation holistically, integrating issues such as land and water, energy, integrated rural development and the role of women.

2. Action taken in other regions

Interim action in the Asian region

21. It is encouraging to note that there are now many serious efforts under way for the implementation of the Convention in the Asian region. In particular, it was noted that a concept paper for implementation is being prepared and will be discussed at the special meeting organized by India.

22. The large countries of Asia, in particular India and China, gave special presentations of the action undertaken. There was also a contribution by a representative of Chinese non-governmental organizations. In both these countries ambitious programmes are being implemented. In particular it was noted that successful action will require a firm commitment by Governments both at national and subregional levels; awareness-building efforts, including within the education sector, to enable local populations to contribute to combating desertification in an efficient way; particular efforts to disseminate and use technologies that are efficient and appropriate in the framework of combating desertification.

23. The countries of the Aral Sea region underlined the dimensions of the disaster of the Aral Sea, both with regard to the physical consequences and the impact on populations, in particular the health situation. They also underlined

the importance of the cooperative action now under way in the region, and referred in particular to the recent Nukus Declaration and the preparations under way for a regional convention. It is also obvious that action in the Aral Sea region would need the support of the Convention and that therefore different ways of linking the Convention to the Aral Sea situation should be explored.

24. The various countries in the region of West Asia emphasized that recent political developments have opened the way for new action to combat desertification and for new possibilities of efficient cooperation. They also pointed out that their joint experiences in dealing with dryland issues would be brought to bear on the problems in other regions, particularly in Africa.

25. It was pointed out by representatives of the Transcaucasus region and of the Russian Federation, that the problems in that part of the world are serious and warrant attention under the Convention. In particular, it was mentioned that a European Arid Land Centre is under establishment in the Republic of Kalmykia and that it is hoped that this initiative would receive international support. Furthermore, the representative of the Russian Federation commented on the possible accession of Russia to the Convention and the Chairman underlined that he would make all efforts to facilitate such accession.

26. All countries in the region that participated in the discussion underlined that they saw the Convention as an important element in supporting their work to combat desertification. A number of them indicated that early ratification or accession is expected.

27. A statement was made on behalf of Asian non-governmental organizations. More generally, the importance of the role of non-governmental organizations in the Asian region was stressed. It was noted that recently an important meeting of non-governmental organizations had been held in Pakistan.

Interim action in the Latin American region

28. A full report was given by the delegations of Costa Rica and Argentina on the first regional Conference on the Convention, which was held recently at Buenos Aires. This meeting was successful and demonstrated that there is very strong support for the Convention in the region. Work is now going on to draft a regional action programme for Latin America and the Caribbean to support the national action programmes and facilitate coordination on science and technology. Special emphasis was put on the need to mobilize external and regional financial resources. Among other priority actions, the Conference had defined the need to speed up the ratification and accession process, and to establish national action programmes and national focal points.

29. Several delegations of Latin American countries made statements in which they supported the conclusions of the Conference at Buenos Aires. They also informed the Committee of the important action that is now being undertaken at the national level and of the efforts under way for early ratification of the Convention. The Committee also heard a statement on behalf of Latin American non-governmental organizations.

30. It was proposed that the next session of the Committee should aim at a systematic discussion of the situation in the various subregions of the Latin American region.

31. Taken together, the various statements gave an encouraging picture of intense activity in Latin America within the framework of interim action under the Convention. The wish was expressed that close contacts should be established between Latin America and other regions.

Interim action in the northern Mediterranean region

32. The delegation of Spain made a presentation of the measures taken in the region as a result of the regional meeting in Almería, Spain, in June 1995.

33. It was noted that the European Union is elaborating a number of important programmes in the Mediterranean region and that the Convention will have an important impact on these programmes. The northern Mediterranean countries are also ready to extend cooperation in the Mediterranean region.

34. A procedural proposal was made regarding the representation of the northern Mediterranean region in the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties.

C. Review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds

35. The Committee held a discussion on agenda item 5, "Review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds" at its 5th and 6th meetings, on 7 and 12 February. At the 5th meeting, the Executive Secretary of the interim secretariat introduced documents A/AC.241/52 and Add.1.

36. The representative of the Netherlands informed the Committee that, in conformity with the pledge made by Minister Pronk, his Government would be contributing the equivalent of US$ 600,000. The speaker also specified that this contribution was meant to finance, inter alia, the participation of eligible countries in the sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee and the participation and reinforcement of the capacity of non-governmental organizations, as well as to support the secretariat's projects during the interim period. He finally specified that further consultation would be carried out with the secretariat on this subject.

37. The representative of Germany informed the Committee that his country had finalized the transfer procedure for their pledge of US$ 50,000.

38. The representative of Canada requested the Secretariat to improve its reporting system regarding expenditures incurred under the Trust Fund. The representative of the interim secretariat in charge of budget and administration explained in this regard that United Nations procedures did not allow much flexibility, but also stressed that the secretariat was ready to discuss with interested delegations any specific issue.

39. The Chairman of the Committee also invited all interested delegations to contact the interim secretariat on matters related to the status of extrabudgetary resources, in order to get all the details needed.

40. Finally, the Chairman expressed his gratitude to the members of the Committee for their generosity and stressed the importance of their contribution to both Committee funds.

APPENDIX IV

Draft provisional agenda for the ninth session of the Committee

1. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.

2. Preparation for the Conference of the Parties.

3. Special action:

   (a) Urgent action for Africa;

   (b) Action taken in the Latin American, Asian and northern Mediterranean regions.

4. Status of signature and ratification of the Convention.

5. Review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds.

6. Adoption of the provisional agenda for the tenth session.

7. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its ninth session.